EARLY GRAMMATICAL NOTES ON PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN

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PREFACE

The nucleus of this article is a translation of some interesting grammatical notes compiled by J. M. Beck, of the Reading ADLER, who was one of the outstanding co-editors of the famous HARBAUGH'S HARFE: GEDICHTE IN PENNSYLVANISCH-DEUTSCHER MUNDART (edited by B. Bausman and others, Reformed Church Publication Board, Phila., 1870). Mr. Beck, whose work and co-operation are acknowledged by Bausman in his 'Vorrede') (dated May, 1870), was the man who arranged the vocabulary (in three parallel columns: Pennsylvania German, English, Standard German) which appears on pp. 113-121 of the HARFE. This vocabulary (Wortverzeichniss') however is preceded by a brief set of remarks (pp.111-113), in German, and it is these remarks on the linguistic phase of our dialect that I would bring to the attention of the reader.

Let us not forget that Beck's notes form one of the earliest attempts to describe the main characteristics of Pennsylvania German. It is true that Der Verein der Deutschen Presse von Pa. (organized in 1862) was one of the first groups to come to the defense of the dialect, and that this group, the reports of whose meetings appeared in the CORRESPONDENT UND DEMOKRAT (an Easton German-language newspaper), must have had interesting discussions and debates on the subject of the Pennsylvania German dialect its features, its vocabulary, etc. (cf., among others, the reports appearing in the above paper on Feb. 17, 1869, Sept. 1, 1869, Jan. 5, 1870); and it is equally true that Prof. S. S. Haldeman's philological study, PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH: A DIALECT OF SOUTH GERMAN WITH AN INFUSION OF ENGLISH (London and Phila., 1872: 69 pp.) grew out of an original paper which had been read by Prof. A. J. Ellis, British scholar, before the Philological Society of London as early as June 3, 1870. Yet, Beck's observations, which doubtless sprang from the various discussions in Der Verein der Deutschen Presse, have not been given the attention they rightfully deserve, although they appeared in print more or less contemporaneously with other early attempts to outline the grammatical structure of the dialect. Prof Otto Springer (Department of Germanic Languages, University of Pennsylvania) has erroneously ascribed these grammatical notes to Bausman in his recent article, 'The Study of the Pennsylvania German Dialect' (in: THE JOURNAL OF ENGLISH AND GERMANIC PHILOLOGY, XLII, Jan. 1943, pp.1-39; reviewed and summarized in the ECK, May 8, 1943). J. M. Beck, and not Bausman, is the one who deserves the credit, and his name should be substituted at the proper places in the Springer article, viz: p.21, line 12; p.27, footnote 55; p.34, item 60 in the Bibliography.

There follows here, then, a translation of Beck's notes. My own footnotes will be indicated by numbers in parentheses after a number of the statements; these notes will follow in proper sequence below the translation. The original pagination is noted for convenient reference.

VOCABULARY

(p111):

In order to explain many of the words which have appeared in the preceding poems (1), and in order to simplify this vocabulary, it is necessary to note a few characteristic features or, rather, grammatical rules; and it is just these rules which give Pennsylvania German its rightful place among the other living German dialects.

Pennsylvania German belongs to the dialects of South Germany. The dialect which is most nearly related to it is the Palatine, or rather the Westrich branch (2) of that dialect, and this relationship may be traced back to the early emigration of Palatines to eastern Pennsylvania. (3).

Like all dialects, this one also has many peculiarities in various localities; but taken collectively, the Pennsylvania German dialect has certain principal features which are everywhere recognizable and which may be regarded as the triumphant outcome of a hundred-year struggle of the Palatine dialect with other South German, even Saxon and Moravian dialects, and, of course, with the English language.

The view that all German Pennsylvanians are of pure German descent is quite false. The names and the genealogical trees of many quite German—that is, Pennsylvania German—families in the rural districts demonstrate a Scotch, (p:112) Irish, Swedish or French extraction. In many sections, as in the Lehigh Valley, the German element has remained purer; in other regions, as in the valley of the Susquehanna and on the other side (4) of the Allegheny mountains, it is mixed more with the English element; everywhere, however, are to be found the same principal features, which are as follows:

1. A striving toward simplification and contraction wherever two different vowels (diphthongs) or consonants come together, in which case the stronger vowel or consonant is usually doubled (5); for example, **aach** (6) for auch; **kleen** (7) for klein; **Kinner** for Kinder; **Kopp** for Kopf. This same desire to simplify is also evident in the case of the triphthongs, which become their respective diphthongs, as in **Bebei** and **Geleit** for Gebaeude and Gelaeute. The noteworthy exceptions are similar-sounding words with the same diphthong, in which case the one remains and the other contracts, as: Weide (willow-tree) remains **Weide;** Weide (pasture) becomes **Weed;** Laib (loaf of bread) becomes **Leeb;** Leib (body) remains **Leib** (8). Noteworthy, too, is the diphthong **oi,** which appears in **Hoi,** Heu; **Roi,** Reihe; and **Boi** (pie), cake (9).

2. The combination **st** has the sound of **scht** throughout (10). Exceptions to this are words which have been borrowed from English, and the little word 'ist'—which is generally pronounced like the Westrich and English 'is'; for in only a few localities does one hear the real Palatine or Suabian 'isch' (11).

3. Everywhere there is a prevailing tendency to change t to **d,** b to **w,** p to **b,** g to **kh,** and z to **s** (12).

4. We find scarcely a trace in Pennsylvania German of the most peculiar characteristics of the Westrich dialect: the change from d to t and r, and the contraction of d to t after l to ll; as 'laden' to 'lare,' 'Gewitter' to 'Gewirrer, 'halten' to 'halle,' 'mild' to 'mill' (13). Even the dropping of the final syllable 'en' is not so frequent; the 'n' often becomes, to be sure, a nasal sound, which is shown here with an apostrophe ('); often it disappears entirely, but never both 'e' and 'n' (14).

(p.113):

5. English has had a remarkable influence on the sentence structure. Whenever, in this regard, there seems to be a revolt against the rules of Standard German grammar, then it is always an exchange of the English rule for the German one, which fact causes the syntax of the sentence to sound often very peculiar to the German ear. As, for example: Hen, scherr **der** blind Gaul uf; mer welle uf **der** Markt fahre—(Heinrich, schirre **den** blinden Gaul auf; wir wollen auf **den** Markt fahren). (15).

The High German words which occur here and there were used by Harbaugh for the sake of the rime, and many English expressions, with which he had originally overloaded some of his poems, have been replaced, according to his wish, by Pennsylvania German ones (16).

Finally, it should be mentioned that the spelling, or orthography, has been so chosen, that the above-mentioned characteristics might be shown as clearly as possible, even for the reader in the old Fatherland, or for purposes of comparison with other works on German dialects. J.M.B.

NOTES

(1) That is, the poems in the HARFE. Harbaugh's Pennsylvania German poems had appeared prior to 1870 in his popular magazine, THE GUARDIAN. Cf (pp.173ff. of chapter VII, 'Pennsylvania German Literature,' by H. H. Reichard, pp.167-224 of THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMANS (ed. by R. Wood, etc., Princeton University Press, 1942). Dr. Reichard says, p.175: 'After Harbaugh's death Doctor Passavant of THE LUTHERAN urged Doctor Schaff to assemble the poems and publish them in book form. The task was referred to the Reverend Benjamin Bausman, who succeeded Harbaugh in the editorship of THE GUARDIAN. The book was published in 1870. The language revision, removal of many English words, was done by J. A. Beck of Reading, an undertaking which had been approved by Harbaugh, but for which he had never found time.' Reichard had, unfortunately, given the incorrect middle initial for Beck, since it should read: J. M. Beck. There was a J. A. Beck of Harrisburg, who sketched the attractive cuts of Das alt Schulhaus, Die alte Miehl, the Harbaugh homestead, and Der alte Feierheerd which adorn the HARFE.

(2) Since Beck's time the swing has been in another direction, so that many are of the opinion that Pennsylvania German resembles most closely the dialects of the north Vorderpfalz, and not those known as the Westrich dialects. Cf especially: C. H. Eshleman, 'The Origin of the Pennsylvania German Dialect,' ECK, Nov. 2, 9, 16, 1935; A. F. Buffington, PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN: A GRAMMATICAL AND LINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE DIALECT (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard, 1937; typescript), and 'Pennsylvania German; its Relation to other German Dialects,' AMERICAN SPEECH, XIV (1939), 276-286. The latter article had appeared under different title but in almost identical form in the ECK, Dec. 10, 17, 1938. The matter of which Palatine dialect is nearest Pennsylvania German is still a moot question.

(3) Even at this early date, 1870, Beck is certain that our dialect is almost entirely Palatine in origin and character. This is the modern view. The few supposed shibboleths of Swiss Alemannic have also been found to exist in Middle German dialects as shown in recent studies of the dialect of Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, Plankstadt (southwest of Heidelberg), and Speyer. Cf. J. W. Frey, THE GERMAN DIALECT OF EASTERN YORK COUNTY (Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois, 1941; typescript, 478pp.), pp. xvii-xix; also: O. Springer, 'The Study of the Pennsylvania German Dialect' THE JOURNAL OF ENGLISH AND GERMANIC PHILOLOGY, XLII (Jan. 1943), pp.27-29.

(4) That is, the western part of the State of Pennsylvania.

(5) This statement (and many of the linguistic observations which follow it) is naive and scientifically unsound. Through modern philology we have learned not to say that a dialect sound, or word, or pronunciation is the result of a change or 'mutilation' of it's High German cousin. We compare, on the other hand, Pennsylvania German with other German dialects, or with its Middle High German ancestor—the language (or group of languages) from which all German dialects and High German itself have sprung! It is erroneous, therefore, to say that 'High German Kinder became Pennsylvania German KINNER. With the exception of some few church words and expressions, Pennsylvania German is by no means derived from Standard New High German; the two languages emanated from Middle High German and traveled different paths. We say, then, that Pennsylvania German KINNER 'represents' the plural of the Middle High German noun 'kint,' and that it probably got its form from its Palatine cousin, which in turn had developed gradually and slowly from Middle High German. Beck, like all of his contemporaries, must be excused on the grounds that philologists in his time just did not make the right and scientific approach in studying the Pennsylvania German dialect and its origin.

(6) Note the **eh** in **aach** 'also,' which today is heard only as **aa.** This is interesting, if we can trust Beck's notation.

(7) Today this word would be spelled **glee** 'small.' Beck himself says that often such a final **n** is dropped with compensatory nasalization. Cf. point **4**, page 112.

(8) As stated in note 5 above, the comparisons here between German and the dialect are unsound. PaG **Weide** represents MHG (Middle High German) wide, whereas PaG **Weed** represents MHG weid(e); likewise, PaG **Leeb** often spelled **Laeb**) represents MHG leip, whereas PaG **Leib** represents MHG lip. What the equivalents are in New High German does not have anything to do with the Pennsylvania German dialect forms.

(9) The statement here concerning the diphthong **oi** is one of the most interesting in the whole essay. Beck names only three examples, one being an English loan word (**Boi**), containing this diphthong. He doubtless knew all the other dialect words having this diphthong, as there are but a dozen native words (excluding compounds) and about four frequently-occurring loan words which contain **oi.** These are as follows: **Babbegoi** 'parrot,' **droye** (past. part. **Gedroit)** 'to threaten rain,' **Hoi** 'hay,' **Hoiet** 'haying time,' **Moi** 'May' **Oi** (pl. **Oyer)** 'egg.' **oi!** 'oh!, 'goodness!', **Roih** (pl. **Roihe** or **Roiher)** 'row,' **schtroye** (past part. **g'schtroit)** 'to bed cattle, horses' (a variant of **schtree-e** **Woih** 'hawk,' and **Zoyer** 'hand of a clock' (a variant for **Zeeche**). The four common loans are: **Boi** 'pie,' **Groyer** or **Vendu-Groyer** 'crier auctioneer,' **entschoye** (past part. **ge-entschoit)** 'to enjoy,' and **Loyer** 'lawyer.' For further material on this diphthong and the words containing it, see: J. W. Frey, 'Notes on the Diphthong **oi** in Pennsylvania Dutch,' AMERICAN SPEECH, XVIII (April, 1943 , 112-116. As noted in that article, there are a number of compounds ending in **-BOI** (names of various kinds of pies), and three with **-woih,** viz: **Hinkelwoih** 'chicken hawk,, **Ooswoih** 'turkey buzzard,' and **Schtoosswoih** 'chicken hawk.' It would be well to add here the two common compounds with **Moi,** that is, **Moiabbel** 'mandrake' and **Moiblumm** 'lily of the valley,' and the verb **moye** (past part. **gemoit)** to go maying, celebrate the first of May.' Under loan words, the following may be added: **Groye** (past part. **gegroit** and **Vendu-Groyere** (past part. **Vende-Gegroyert)** 'to cry at a sale, to auctioneer.' Beck's translation of 'Kuchen, cake' for **Boi** might have been the best German equivalent he knew or might have grown out of the double form 'pie-cake,' as in **'shoo-fly-boi'** known as both 'shoo-fly pie' and 'shoo-fly cake.' Dr. A. L. Shoemaker (Schnecksville, Lehigh County) reports one additional word containing the diphthong **oi:** loiere (past participle **geloiert)** 'to coo' (as of infants). This may be a variant of what Lambert records as **leiere** (MHG liren, NHG leiern), which means 'to harp on one string, hum a monotonous tune, thrum or drone an air.'

(10) The combination **st** does not, as Beck says, always become **scht.** The exception is always when **t** is a verb ending added to a verb whose stem ends in **s,** viz: **esse** 'to eat,' 3rd person singular present **er esst.**

(11) The question of **iss** and **isch** is still rather unsettled. Dr. A. L. Shoemaker, who is an active field worker in the dialect (both in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, such as Arthur, Illinois, where he gathered material for his doctoral dissertation), claims he has heard speakers today using **isch.** I myself have never heard it in York County, yet H. L. Fisher (of York) consistently wrote this form in his dialect poetry ('S ALT MARIK-HAUS MITTES IN D'R SCHTADT, etc., York, 1879; and KURZWEIL UN' ZEITFERTREIB, 2nd ed., York, 1896). Whatever the status of **isch** is today, it is of extreme importance that Beck says it seemed to be a rare form back in 1870.

(12) As noted above in 5, this statement about consonant changes in Pennsylvania German is unsound because Beck is comparing dialect forms with Standard German equivalents. Thus, he is thinking in terms of examples or pairs like the following: German Tag PaG **Daag** (t to **d**), German heben PaG **hewe** (b to **w**), German Pflug PaG **Blug** (p, or rather pf, to **b**), German gehabt PaG **g'hatt,** pronounced **katt** (g to **kh** — although I am somewhat puzzled by what he means with the combination kh), and German Holz PaG **Hols** (z to **s**). If any comparisons are to be made, they should be made with Middle High German equivalents, not Standard New High German ones. A modern phonemic analysis of the consonantal sounds in the dialect may be found in my own article, 'The Phonemics of English Loan Words in Eastern York County Pennsylvania Dutch,' AMERICAN SPEECH, XVII (April, 1942), 94-101.

(13) Cf. here, however, the common word **ball** 'soon' (representing MHG balde, balt, NHG bald), and the word **gell** 'not so?' (MHG, NHG gelt). It is true, as **Beck** says, that Pennsylvania German has this development to a very limited extent.

(14) Beck is thinking here of German verb infinitives ending in 'en,' cf. German trinken, PaG **drinke.** There are also a number of dialect nouns ending in **-e** which represent German nouns ending in 'en,' e.g. PaG **Backe** 'cheek' NHG Backen or Backe, PaG **Graage** 'collar' NHG **Kragen.** The **-e** of the PaG word was generally preserved when the Middle High German noun was a weak declension noun; cf. the MHG equivalents for the above, backe and krage.

(15)—It is true that the accusative in Pennsylvania German usually looks like the nominative in form (except for personal and reflexive pronouns), but the form **den** also occurs as a masculine accusative singular. It has been preserved throughout the dialect in the common expression **den Owet** 'this evening,' which is pronounced **de-nowet.**

(16) This is another indication that the poems in the HARFE are not in their exact original form. Perhaps the changes which were made, especially the insertion of German words, caused the poems to have less of a Pennsylvania German appearance. By reading the original form of the poems in THE GUARDIAN, we get a clearer picture of what the dialect was like prior to 1870.

EN RAETSEL

Was fer en Karrich hot ken Gemee?

EN SCHUBKARRICH

Dr. Louis J. Livingood of Wyomissing, Pa. informs us that the above riddle had its origin in the following incident which is said to have occurred in a town in Berks County.

Der Parre waar eens vun selle as immer an de Leit waar fer sie in die Karrich griege. Er hot als die Schaffleit uff em Weg g'schtoppt un sie g'frogt, ferwas sie net in die Karrich kaemte. Mol ee Daag hot er der Tscho Hossekopp g'schtoppt, die Weil er uff em Weg am Schaffe waar. Der Tscho waar wennich simbel, wie sie als g'saat hen un der Parre hot gemeent er daet Schpass hawwe mit em Tscho. Der Parre saagt, "Tscho, ferwas kummscht du net in die Karrich?" Der Tscho tschaat mol Weil, noh saagt er, "Wie ich en gleener Bu waar, hot die Mommi mich in die Karrich genumme wie's Nachtmohl waar un des waar so mit Leit as sie mich yuscht rum g'schowe hen. Des hawwich net gegliche un bin noch sellem nimmi neigange. Nau bin ich uffgewachse un hab mei eegner Karrich". Mit sellem langt er nunner un nemmt fascht an seim Schubkarrich un faahrt fart. Un nau wissen ihr aa die Andwart zum Raetsel "Was fer en Karrich hot ken Gemee?"